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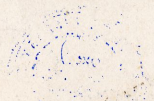
# QUEENSLAND

THE  
WINTER PARADISE  
OF  
AUSTRALASIA.





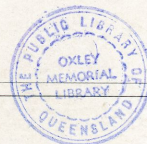
MUSEUM



ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY MR. C. E. S. FRYER.  
RAILWAY DEPARTMENT, QUEENSLAND.



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# THE WONDERS OF THE NOR' EAST.

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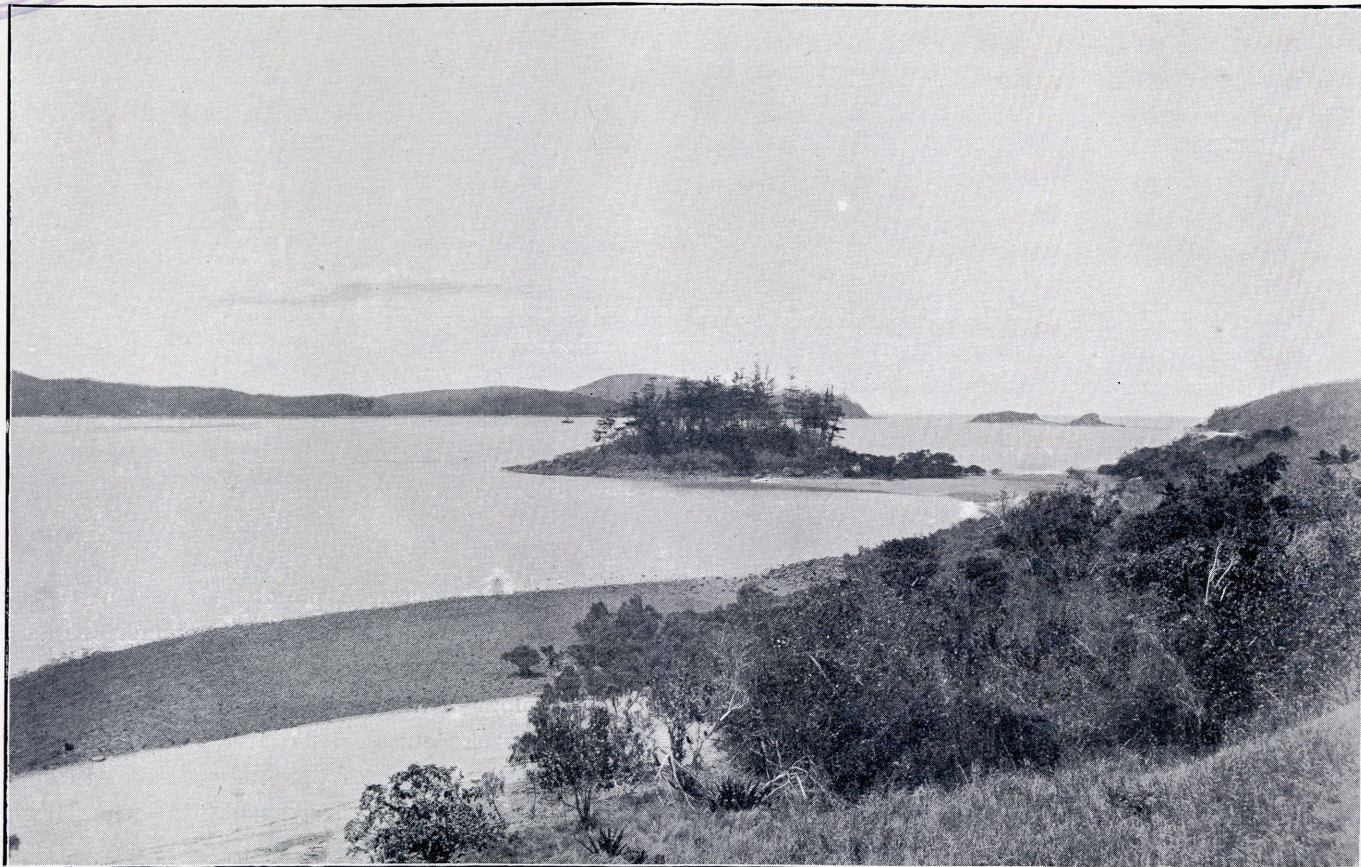
By RANDOLPH BEDFORD.

**THE** Depths of the Pacific send a current from the East—a current which rushes Westward past the Southern extremity of the Barrier Reef—that coral wonder of the world—and strikes the Queensland coast at Broadsound, where it piles up 29 feet of local tide. There the current splits—half of it goes North within the Reef for 1,300 miles, half goes South to be blessed by Southern-bound shipping for its three knots of help, and at Gabo Island goes East again to whence it came. But it is not the same water; heated by the North, it goes South and East again, leaving a track eleven degrees warmer than New Zealand waters of the same latitude.

My definition of Heaven is North-east Australia, between May and September—the Queensland coast for a thousand miles within the Reef in the so-called winter. I have gloated over its memories in the bitter middle of the year in Melbourne, and in the end have rushed away from mere duty to its romance; and last January, in Glasgow, the smell of the Northern Sea, the colour of the great Reef, the opulence of the Northern jungles were so tangibly present that my homesickness broke out in verse at least once a week; seeing, instead of the chimney stacks of South Melbourne, the mighty cedars of the Barron rising through the creepers of the jungle; and to my ears the reverberance of the Broomielaw drowned by the thunders of the Reef.

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A BIT OF WHITSUNDAY PASSAGE.



From Broadsound to Cape York the days and nights, the sea and sky, the hazy land, the ship that rarely rocks its keel an inch and never closes its ports for a thousand miles and more, are all expressions of tangible romance and of visible enchantment. The scented breath of a bush fire from the land, the tropic scents of the tide-bared Reef mingled with the odours of towns that seem to be made of pineapples; distant reefs lying in the sea like shadows, the mountains of the Main blue in distance, the lazy inner sea lipping 1,300 miles of cay and coral; the water shining like a taut bowstring under the sun, and by night a silver plane that bears the ship as placid as a resting gull.

The coast is full of the romance of effort and endurance: Cook and his coral-plugged and leaky ship beaching in Endeavour River after the anxious days of Cape Tribulation; Bligh and his boat of the "Bounty"; great Matthew Flinders; and Lizzie Watson, who agonised on a waterless cay and saw her child die before death mercifully came to herself.

The Man and Wife Rocks and The Child east of Great Keppel Island, Herald's Prong, and Thirsty Sound; Half-tide Rock and Gar-fish Cluster, have each their story of effort, achievement, and failure. And where recorded romance is not, the eye supplies it at every point on this marvellous coast: The lion shape of Pentecost and Jesuit Point; the Cid; Orpheus Isle and Miranda Point; Townsville, Tower Hill, and Magnetic Island; Bowen and its white beaches of skirmishing, porcelain-blue soldier crabs; Cape Bowling Green; and Whitsunday Passage and Hinchinbrook Channel, which, like Albany Pass and Mourilyan, have been stolen direct out of Paradise.

It is an easy possibility to see these wonders without being an hour at sea on an uneven keel. From any point in the South the Reef can be reached by railway, and without a foot of broken water; and from Keppel Bay to Thursday Island there are but a thousand miles of mill-pond calm. The railway track from





A BIT OF HINCHINBROOK PASSAGE.



Brisbane is full of interest of a different sort; Beerwah, Ngungun, Coonowrin, and Tibberawockum—mountains which are not so fearsome as their names; Bundaberg and the sugar-planters of the Burnett; the fine city of Rockhampton, and near it Mount Morgan, one of the world's mining wonders. And, from Keppel Bay, a sea dead but for its tides; the rice-white sand on mainland, beach, and cay—the steamer so steady that the web-toed gulls stand flat-footed on the jumper stay as the engines drive her at a twelve-knot gait through the sap-green water.

Civilisation has done much for Cairns, but not too much. The plateau beyond it, the rich alluvials, the dense vegetation of ferns and orchids, the tangle of immense cedars, lianas, and wild banana have not been improved out of existence by the actors in the wondrous story of persistent courage represented in the scaling of the Cairns Range by the old tracks. The Barron Gorge and the Falls are still as wildly beautiful as when Captain Cook sailed almost under the shadow of Bellenden-Ker a hundred and thirty-five years ago, and named the arm of the sea by Cape Grafton—Trinity Bay. The traveller now scales the wall of mountain luxuriously in a train, skirting the kauri-grown gorge of the Barron, and almost splashed by the spray of Stony Creek Falls; leaving Cairns sitting in the wreck of its jungle a foot or so above high-water mark—sweltering in its sun heat in the summer, when it achieves 12 or 15 feet of rain, but merely hot in the winter, and peculiarly healthy at all times—and borne swiftly through many tunnels and around curves ramparted with bananas and ferns.

Once on the tableland at Kuranda another new world begins for the Southerner. He has had the wonder of the Reef passage, and the romantic new experience of a tropic town in his own country; and now comes to him the marvel of the Atherton Scrub. He has seen the Barron Falls at Kuranda—so indescribably magnificent that only a bad craftsman would attempt their description; a quarter of a mile of mad water, leaping 800 feet to a gorge, wandering reptilianly to the sea—a serpent in diorite; and half-way down the





THE BLUFF, FINCHINBROOK PASSAGE.

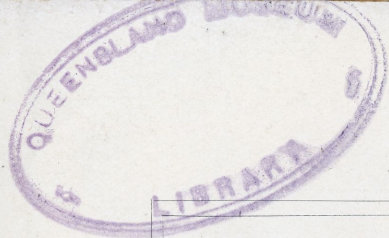


descent of the Barron River into the gorge a central tooth of blackened rock, and on it a tree growing calmly in all that hell of tortured suds and water.

To the Falls has succeeded typical North Queensland plain country—granitic, ant-hilled, sparsely wooded with gums. The railway forks at Mareeba—the Northerly branch goes to Chillagoe and its rocks, caves, and other lime formations of great beauty—the Balancing Rock, the Leaning Rock, the Lizard's Head, and the caves at Girofla; the Southerly railway strikes over an elevating plain of basalt, and, in 18 miles or so, reaches its terminus at the Atherton Scrub. There is absolutely no more beautiful forest nor any richer soil on earth than this. I lived in and near this Atherton forest for a year or two, and to me its beauty is as fresh and alluring as when I first saw it, nine years ago. There are cedars and crow-foot elm and silky oak—rosewood and satinwood—ferns, orchids, and flowering vines carrying a hundred feet of blossom from ground to summit; banyans of marvellous extent and decorative beauty. Lake Eacham, the unfathomable, which was once an active volcano, and is now a tarn of violet water in the mountains, is only two hours away; Herberton, with its climate of southern Tasmania, is but a dozen miles distant by the coach road across the range.

In the North-eastern State—the richest and the most beautiful of all the Australias—the very length of coast line and the number of excellent harbours have insisted on a policy of decentralisation unknown to the South. As the result, you have not one railway system, but five, so that the voyager of the Reef may see the back country of Bowen; of Townsville—Charters Towers to far West on the Cloncurry road; Cairns to Chillagoe; Cooktown to Laura. And then the tramways of local government link the sugar lands with the sea at Lucinda Point, the Johnstone, Cairns to the Mulgrave, and at other points. In a round trip of a month from Sydney or Melbourne, the tourist can secure a knowledge of the Reef and the richness and the beauty of the mainland; a few weeks longer would make that knowledge intimate.





HAYCOCK ISLAND, HINCHINBROOK PASSAGE.



The Barrier itself is practically unknown; yet its value economically, apart from its value in beauty, makes it one of the great assets of Australia—neglected though it be at this moment. It produces a hundred thousand pounds a year or so to Queensland trade, and it has the potentialities of a million. The area inside the Reef in Queensland waters is 80,000 square miles; it is full of raw wealth: pearl-shell and corals, fish and bêche-de-mer. It has been made a safe highway for all the ships of the world on the Eastern route to the North; it gives to Australia—the land of big things—the longest stretch of pilotage in all the seas.

All its reefs, and shoals, and pools, and all its depths, are full of life; the channels and lagoons within the coral are instinct with bewildering beauty. All the corals are there—not the dead, bleached skeletons of corals which we see in glass cases flanked by a stuffed and preposterous blow-fish; but with all the brilliance of the living coral animal, who is no more an insect than the shark is an insect. The living reefs have all the colours of the tropics; the lavish hand which tints the painted finch, and splashes pigments on the bird of paradise, and paints the parrot-fish a livery of scarlet, black, and grey, has worked upon these corals; dyeing them in colour schemes the Southern eye will at first sight call impossible. The great violet bouquet-shaped madrepora; coral in delicate spikey flowers—the branches of buff, and the petals of magenta; staghorn corals tinted in millionous variants of brown, green, yellow, and lilac; the madrepora rosaria—pale lemon at its bases and flesh pinked at the tips; labyrinthine coarsely toothed corals—their ridges golden brown, their valleys myrtle green; corals of pale pink, purple, brilliant rose, and blue. A tongue of reef—its two masses split by a fathom channel awash at dead low springs—growing slowly through its thousands of centuries, from the symmetrical corallum, a few inches wide, to this tremendous marvel; its growth on its axis finished; and after a million years of action still increasing on its periphery—the finest illustration extant of the beauty of all prudent energy.





S.S. PALMER PASSING HAYCOCK ISLAND, EINCINBROOK PASSAGE.



Carbonate of lime can be a dead and ugly thing; here on the Barrier it is a thing of infinite loveliness. Corals shaped like skulls, and therefore called Brain Corals, having the freaks of cerebral markings and giving their name to the peculiar Skull Island, which looks like an ancient battle-ground of low-grade types, the white skulls shining in the sun; corals corrugated like alligator skin; asteroids or star corals; the giant anemone and an attendant galaxy of sea-stars; the frills and furbelows of the clam shell—ultramarine, and peacock-blue, and green; spotted in turquoise and barred in black; corals, shrimp-pink with yellow terminations; cup corals, convoluted and long-stalked; corals in large ovate masses, looking in the light-green water like a flock of sheep in an English meadow in early spring; corals like cauliflowers in shape and deep violet with cream edgings for colour; the nodular masses of organ-pipe coral; the corals of Dog Reef, near Port Denison—shaped like a swimming dog; the branching corals of the Madrepore Lagoon; all growing joyously in the opaline water, which is at once the mirror and the shield. All the beauty of form of the prepared coral is but the bleached skeleton of the brilliant life of the Reef.

In the pools between the reefs grows the broad-bladed sea grass; here is the favourite grazing ground of the dugong—that sea pig which was the Siren of the Ancients and the mermaid of the later sailor man.

No man who has once seen the life of the Reef may forget it. The brown wall of Florence and Ghiberti's doors, and the Boboli Gardens; the Duomo of Milan; the Grand Canal and Maria Assoluta of Venice; the Garden of the Pincio in Rome; Pichi Richi Pass in the lake country of South Australia; the Tower of London Rock at Chillagoe; the Barron Falls; sunrise in the Indian Ocean—no man may forget *these* things. But, if he could, the knowledge of the Barrier Reef must stay in the memory, painting itself in brilliant primary colours and with all forms of the bizarre.





THE FAMILY GROUP, NORTH OF HINCHINBROOK.



The deep indigo of *Heliopora* coral as the foot snaps it; a giant anemone two feet in diameter, brilliant in the shallow pools of three-quarter ebb, and a fish and a lobster as brilliant as their host living on friendly terms with the anemone and swimming in and out of its mouth, their one attendant a white transparent prawn, spotted in yellow and red; a star-fish of dappled Antwerp blue and suckers of chrome; clam shells growing to a length of ten feet and a weight of a ton—Captain Cook called them Giant Cockles, ate of some small ones, and saw that they were good; and all the miracles of lime growing at a rate estimatable by the fact that the coral of the Quetta Rock grew up to striking distance of the ship in the space of forty years.

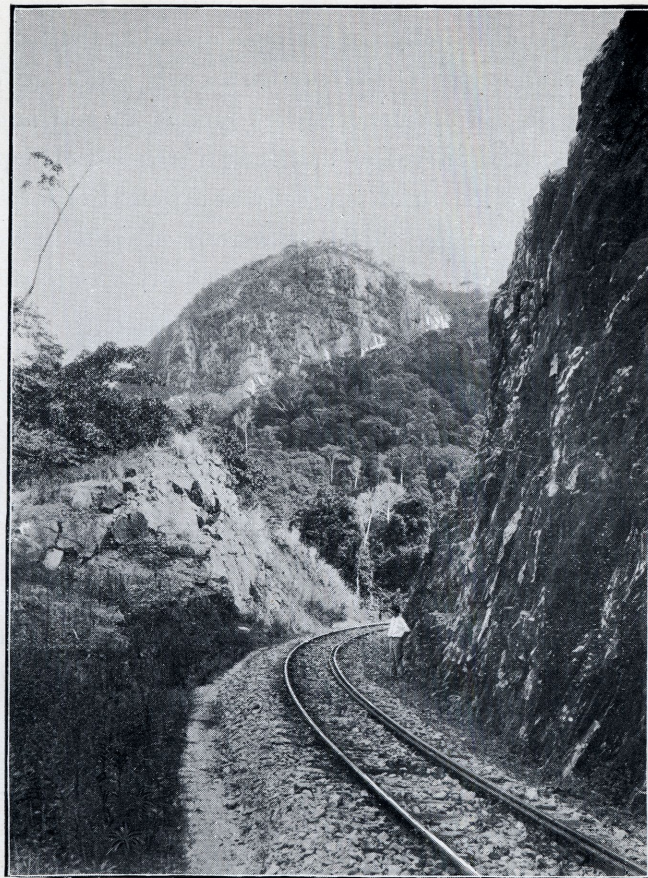
One of the most important industries of the Reef is *bêche-de-mer* or trepang fishing. The trepang are present in the pools between the reefs in all shapes and colours and varieties, and generally visible at low water, lying like great black cucumbers on the sand. They are collected during low tides in the new and full phases of the moon. Boiled, dried, and smoked, trepang is worth up to £90 per ton. Truly is our land the land of plenty. The European millionaire pays thousands of pounds to buy at Monte Carlo the thing we get here for nothing—sunshine and blue skies; for the Casino is but the sauce piquante of the feast. The magnate of England buys turtle or trepang soup at seven and sixpence a plate, and along the Queensland coast you find it and other delicacies of our tropic seas included in the half-crown meal.

Along the Reef are many islands—in itself each a Pacific Cosmos. The island beaches are of corals and shells with a central belt of trees and pandanus. On the lee side the coral shoal sloping gently seaward; on the weather side a two-mile half-circle of reef enclosing a lagoon, thickly populated with shark and turtle. Noddies, terns, gulls, herons, and curlews, shrieking above the surf-noises; the reef-pools filled with brilliant fishes—ultramarine bodied and yellow finned; black with a single electric blue stripe; big blue-spotted sting





STONEY CREEK BRIDGE AND FALLS, CAIRNS RAILWAY.



GLACIER ROCK, CAIRNS RAILWAY.



rays; the grotesque tobacco-pipe fish—a weak swimmer and easily captured—of golden and azure-spotted brown; sheltered in these great coral basins that spring suddenly from unfathomable depths. The Torres Strait pigeon—beloved of the sportsman, in a left-handed kind of way—nests in the forked branches of the ti-tree; there are scrub hens and green bee-eaters, whose throats are a vivid blue, and who wear two long narrow feathers in their tails.

On the islets or the mainland, the man of the gun will find the sportsman's paradise; in the waters within the Reef, the fisherman has waiting for him the king representatives of salt-water life—the government bream, the parrot-fish in shoals of a score strong, the barramundi, the silver bar fish, and the king fish. If he wants excitement, there are the great reef-eels; the skate, which is merely a superior-fleshed kind of flattened-out shark, and is a fine food wasted in all this spendthrift plenty; the horned ox ray, which measures twelve feet across its expanded fins; and the dugong, which sits up in the water and nurses its young like a woman, but, by reason of the stupid surprise which is the permanent expression of its fat, vulgar face, looks not like a mother, but a Missus Gamp discovered in the act of embezzling the invalid's brandy.

The waters of the Reef are full of a gorgeous waste of food; the immense shoals of herring, mackerel, anchovy, and pilchard, of schnapper, bream, rock cod, and giant herrings, live and swim and spawn, and die—and we still import, dried and in tins, the inferior fishes of colder seas.

Turtle—the green edible, the tortoise-shell variety, and the red and yellow backed hawk's-bill—are all here, and come ashore at every cay to lay their eggs; and the curiosity of all this wonder, a delicacy of the outpost islands of the Reef—a small marine worm known as the Palolo—is recorded as appearing in millions for two days only in October and November, the day before, and the day on which, the moon enters her last quarter. This phenomenon is common in the further South Pacific.



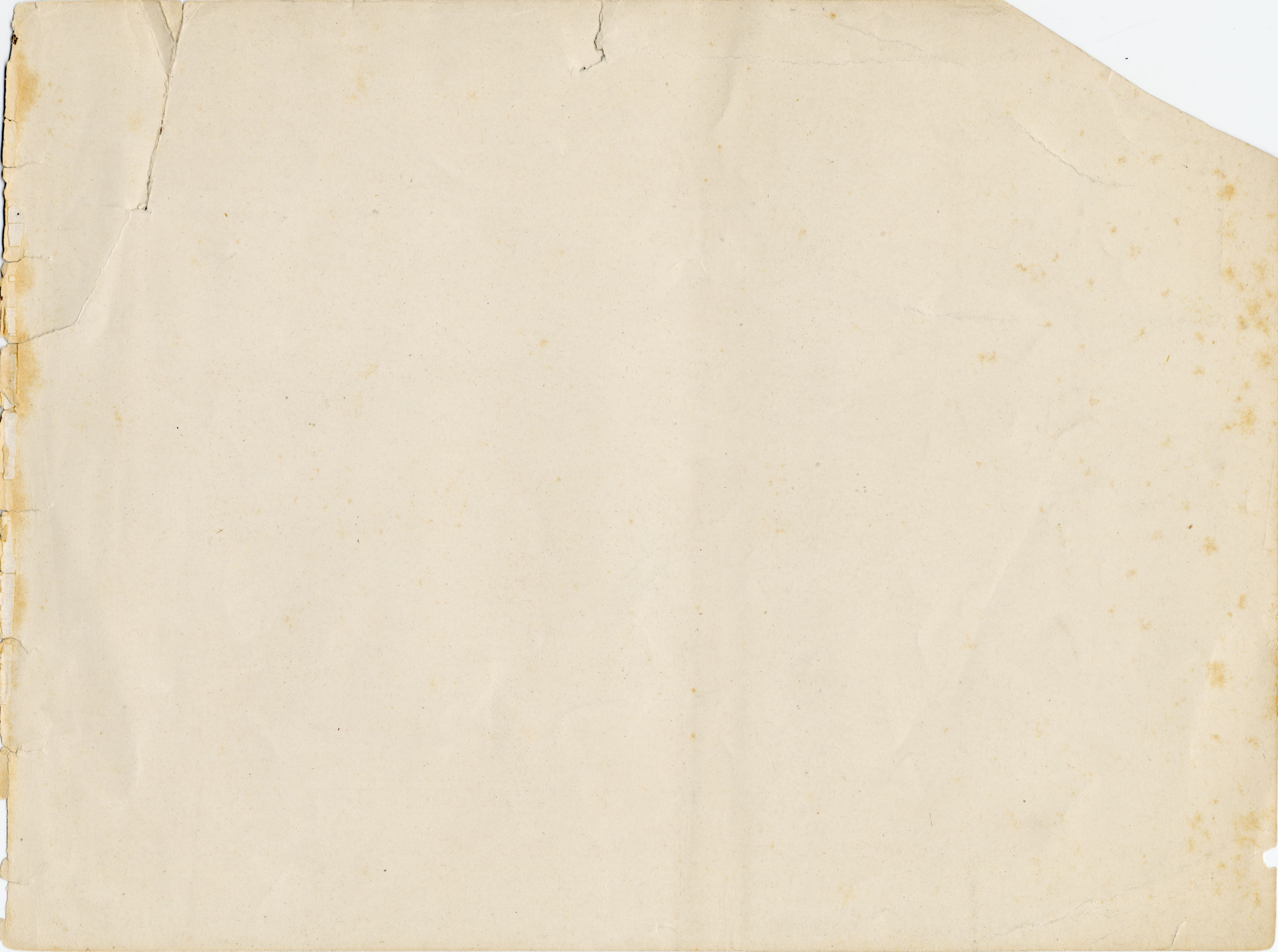
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Two days before this last lunar phase, the natives of the islands assemble in canoes; next dawn millions of worms appear on the surface, discharging the milt in white streams as they swim. It is the function of the wedding of the milt. During the three hours of appearance, the canoes are loaded with them; they are eaten raw or baked in leaves of the breadfruit. Once known, the gourmets of the old world will pay fancy prices for the Palolo; and commerce will batten on this Marriage of Nereids.

They are all unforgettable—the divine air, the opulent warmth, the splashed colours, and the soft waters of the North; the glove and lady's finger sponges growing in the brilliant copses of coral; fish who have been to China for their form and studied Japanese art for their pigments; finny arabesques and curves of green and red, salmon and black, grey and orange, blue and yellow; fish who are all protective fin and tassel; aldermanically stupid fish, with a score of long brown pennants waving from their heads; mad fish, with long retrousse noses; tasselled, banded, striped, speckled, barred, spotted fishes, each painted like a Carpentaria finch.

There be Australians who do not know their country; who have no conception of the luxurious North; and who pursue the tropics to Colombo at great cost—suffering the seas of the Bight and the oppressive ten days across the stale greasy swell of the Indian Ocean to Ceylon; when, at half the expense and in luxurious ease always, North Queensland and the wondrous Reef and the beauties of the Main lie awaiting them. The round trip to Cairns or Cooktown is a matter of an easy month; if time does not tie the tourist, there is another new world in Torres Strait and its islands; a polyglot, polychromatic world of pearlers and Binghis and trepang fishers—and all the new and interesting native peoples of North Queensland waters—of the Three Sisters and Saibai, of Darnley and Nagheer. I know Australia better than most Australians. If there is one place more than another that clinches my belief in our country as the finest of the earth, it is that land of opulence and beauty—the Magic North.







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